

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 02375 041214Z

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3224

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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CINCPAC

CDR JCRC CP SAMAE SAN THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 2375

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, CASC, LA

SUBJECT: DEAN/SHARMAN CASE

1. PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG WALKED UNEXPECTEDLY IN MIDST OF MY FAREWELL CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER AND I NATURALLY SEIZED THE OCCASION TO ASK WHETHER HE HAD ANY NEWS REGARDING DEAN/SHARMAN. SOUPHANOUVONG STATED CATEGORICALLY AND REPEATEDLY THROUGHOUT ENSUING DISCUSSION THAT LPF HAD FOUND NO RPT NO TRACES OF THE TWO BOYS. HE SAID HE HAD JUST RETURNED FROM TWENTY DAYS IN SAM NEUA AND HAD SPENT MUCH TIME ON THIS CASE. TWO MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE HAD GONE TO AREA, ALL RESPONSIBLE LPF OFFICIALS THERE HAD BEEN QUESTIONED, AND THEY HAD FOUND NOTHING.

2. AMBASSADOR AND ACCOMPANYING DCM EXPRESSED ASTONISHMENT, CITING THE NEARLY TWENTY WITNESSES WHO HAD TESTIFIED THEY HAD SEEN THE TWO IN THE CUSTODY OF THE LPF AS WELL AS THE BOATMAN AND PASSENGERS OF PIROQUE WHO HAD SEEN DEAN/SHARMAN ARRESTED BY LPF PATROL AT NAM HIN BOUN. SOUPHANOUVONG RETORTED THAT HE HAD ALL THE LETTERS SENT BY THE AMBASSADOR AND THAT THEY HAD CHECKED ALL THE NAMES AND ALL THE LOCATIONS CITED IN
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 VIENTI 02375 041214Z

THESE LETTERS. HE AFFIRMED NO ONE IN THE REGION KNEW

ANY OF THE NAMES AND THAT THERE WASN'T EVEN AN ENCAMPMENT WHERE THE TWO BOYS WERE ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN HELD PRISONERS. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THE LPF PATROL AT THE MOUTH OF THE HIN BOUN RIVER HAD BEEN QUESTIONED SINCE IT WAS UNDISPUTED THE TWO BOYS HAD BEEN ARRESTED THERE, SOUPHANOUVONG GAVE FUZZY ANSWER THAT LPF HAD CONDUCTED OR WERE CONDUCTING A SEARCH ALONG THE WHOLE BANK OF THE MEKONG IN THAT AREA.

3. PRIME MINISTER WAS CLEARLY SERIOUSLY PERTURBED BY HIS BROTHER'S REPORT AND KEPT REPEATING, "HOW CAN WE GET THIS MATTER CLARIFIED?" AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED AS ONE POSSIBILITY THAT JCCIA MIGHT BE ASKED TO INVESTIGATE, BUT SOUPHANOUVONG TURNED THAT DOWN SAYING FLATLY THAT LPF OFFICIALS HAD ALREADY DONE SO. AMBASSADOR THEN PROPOSED TO PRIME MINISTER THAT HE APPOINT A SENIOR POLICE OFFICER TO REVIEW ALL THE FACTS AVAILABLE ON THE MATTER AND REPORT BACK DIRECTLY TO HIM. THE PRIME MINISTER AGREED WITH THE SUGGESTION AND SAID THAT HE WOULD SPEAK TO THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR PHENG PHONGSAVAN.

4. SOUPHANOUVONG THEN MADE VAGUE ALLUSIONS TO "DIFFICULTIES" WHICH HAVE EXISTED IN AREA NORTH OF THAKHEK. AMONG OTHER THINGS, HE SAID THAT MANY THAIS WERE CROSSING THE MEKONG TO SETTLE IN LAOS. PRIME MINISTER LEAPT ON THIS POINT AND EMPHASIZED THAT INDEED THERE WERE "THOUSANDS" OF THAIS WHO WERE ESCAPING FROM NORTHEAST THAILAND WHICH IS POOR AND IS NOW SUFFERING FROM DROUGHT. HE EVEN ALLEGED THAT THAIS HAD SETTLED IN VILLAGE CONSTRUCTED FOR VETERANS. WHILE SOUPHANOUVONG MADE NO DIRECT ALLEGATIONS, THERE WAS IN HIS REFERENCE TO THAIS AND IN OTHER HINTS DROPPED DURING THE CONVERSATION, A SUGGESTION IN THE AIR THAT LPF HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH DISAPPEARANCE OF TWO BOYS AND THAT RESPONSIBILITY HAD TO BE SOUGHT ELSEWHERE.

5. COMMENT: WE SHALL TRY TO MAKE SURE THAT PRIME MINISTER DOES REVIEW FACTS OF CASE. AS A STARTER I PROPOSE TO GIVE HIM CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN FRENCH WHICH

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 VIENTI 02375 041214Z

WE HAVE PREPARED. I DO NOT THINK THAT PRESS CONFERENCE OR A NEW MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY AT THIS POINT CAN BE OF HELP; LETTERS FROM SENIOR AMERICANS SUCH AS SENATOR KENNEDY, HOWEVER, MIGHT.

6. NEEDLESS TO SAY, WE ARE ALL DEEPLY DISCOURAGED BY THIS DEVELOPMENT. WE SIMPLY TO NOT HAVE ANY RATIONAL EXPLANATION FOR THE LPF UNWAVERING DENIAL OF ALL

RESPONSIBILITY.

7. I HAVE INFORMED AMBASSADOR BORTHWICK WHOSE CLEAR
REACTION WAS THAT "THIS WAS SIMPLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH."
WHITEHOUSE

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